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Leadership and Human Development

Dennis Bunch
University of Mississippi

Jennifer Fillingim
Austin Peay State University

Joe Blackbourn
University of Mississippi

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Dennis Bunch,
The University of Mississippi

Jennifer Fillingim,
Austin Peay State University

Joe Blackburn
The University of Mississippi

Abstract

This article describes Graves' theory of sociological development and its applicability to leadership. The interrelationship of the most common levels of functioning, appropriate management techniques, and methods for facilitating the growth of organization members is examined.

Much of our work as professionals involves the identification and development of effective leadership skills, the creation of model organizations, and the search for the ideal leader. However, this quest is, to a great extent, tied to the human understanding of human behavior. In essence, to lead effectively, one must understand both self and others (Payne, 2004). While various psychological theories are available to allow professionals to explain and understand behavior, often these theories lack the flexibility to address the wide variety of diversity inherent in the human species. What is needed is a model or process by which the key factors in every situation that relate to appropriate leadership

The work of Graves (1966, 1970, 1972, and 1974) provides a framework for addressing the diversity of perception, interpretations, categorization, and reaction that exists within groups or organizations. Graves' work involves a model that emphasizes individual paradigms or value systems which cause persons to perceive, interpret, categorize, and react to a given situation in vastly different ways based upon their specific developmental levels. He described a balanced model of human development and the means by which humans attempt to address the ever-changing problems

in their environment. His position was that humans are evolving in a process that is essentially unending. An outline and description (including the different roles of leaders related to each level) of the most common of Graves' levels of development in Table 1.

Table 1

Graves' Levels of Socio-Biological Development	
LEVEL 3 – The Powerful Self	Power and assertion of the self above others are the motivating factors. Leaders must demand respect and reward immediately.
LEVEL 4 – The Conforming Self	Following the prescribed rules and doing the “right thing” are the motivating factors. Leaders must strictly follow the regulations and provide the appropriate rewards and punishments.
LEVEL 5 – The Material Self	Material gain, success, and winning are motivating factors. Leaders must provide rewards, incentives, rank, power, and position for productivity.
LEVEL 6 – The Sociocentric Self	Collegial, harmonious social relationships with nature and other beings are the motivating factors. Leaders must be a collegial friend and show concern for the group and its members.
LEVEL 7 – The Cognitive Self	Gathering data and making independent, functional, principle-based choices are the motivating factors. Leaders must be competent associates and provide the resources to allow the individual to achieve results in their own way.

According to Payne, Cowan, Cox, and Jordan (1994), the most common paradigms among our current population are level 4, 5, and 6. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship between the different developmental levels.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Graves (1970) states that all human beings are biologically “wired” for each of the different developmental levels, however the specific level of existence a person is operating from is determined by the nature of both the individual’s specific developmental process and personal experiences or intervening history (Shideler, 1988) that either facilitates or impedes developmental progress.

Blackbourn, Papasan, Vinson, and Blackbourn (2000) address the use of Graves’ theory by educational leaders. Leadership within this framework requires leaders to treat organizational members in a differential manner, according to their specific developmental level. In regard to the level 4 individual, Graves (1970) states: “He believes the task of living is to strive for perfection in his assigned role. He believes that salvation will come ultimately, regardless of his original position, to he who lives best by the rules of life prescribed for him. He who sacrifices his wants in the way authority prescribes is most revered.” (p. 148)

Level 4 individuals, due to their need to “do what’s right,” respond best to leadership that is directive and creates a work environment characterized by stability and order. These persons will be productive and perform their job well, as long as leadership can create an organizational climate that has clear parameters and standards for performance. However, leaders must be specific in their directions to level 4 persons, as they will seldom extend their performance beyond such instruction or beyond their specific job description. In addition,

persons functioning at level 4 will often ignore a problem or employ an ineffective, yet familiar solution, rather than address it. In illustrating this point Ossorio (1966, 1978) states in his maxims for behavior description, “If a situation calls for a person to do something he cannot do, he will do something he can do – if he does anything at all” (Maxim #5). Leaders must rigidly prescribe and enforce rules with level 4 persons in an organization. Level 4 persons assume it to be the leader’s responsibility to supervise their conduct in a fair and systematic manner.

Level 5 persons operate from a perspective that values personal prestige, image, rank, and power. According to Graves (1970), the level 5 individual’s value system addresses the need to “improve immeasurably man’s conditions for existence. They create wealth and lead to knowledge which improves the human condition.” (p. 150) Such persons can be the most productive members of any organization as they can clearly conceptualize the reward(s) present in a situation and direct their efforts to achieve their goals. Level 5 persons approach all situations with a “What’s in it for me” perspective and want to know the “rules” so they can “win.” Leaders must provide appropriate rewards (and limits) for such individuals to facilitate maximum productivity. In addition, leaders must also serve as a model of competence and productivity for level 5 persons. Leaders must assume an assertive role when dealing with level 5 members of an organization. Objective evaluation and clearly defined policies are a necessity when managing these persons. The hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of organizations provides an effective means of leading those functioning at level 5.

Graves (1970) describes the situation for persons functioning at level 6 as: “On the surface sociocratic values appear shallower, less serious, and even facile in

contrast to values at other levels because the surface aspect of them shifts as the 'value-other' changes his preference. But the central core of this system is a very solid process. It is being with, in-with, and within the feelings of his 'valued other(s)'. He values interpersonal penetration, communication, committeeism, majority rule, the tender, the subjective, persuasion, softness over 'cold rationality', sensitivity in preference to objectivity, taste over wealth, respectability over power, and persons over things." (p. 151)

Individuals functioning at level 6 value positive social contact in the work environment and the opportunity to work in self-directed teams. Consensual decision making and collegiality are the frameworks within which level 6 persons operate and feel most secure. When dealing with such persons, leaders must allow them to develop individual leadership skills and participate in self-governance abilities while working to secure those resources necessary for them to do their job to best of their capabilities. Level 6 individuals function best when leaders create a collaborative and collegial "team atmosphere" in an organization. Allowing for participation, group decision-making, and a democratic approach to leadership all enhance the management of level 6 persons.

A leader's role not only involves differently meeting the needs of a diverse group of organizational stakeholders, but also in allowing group members to grow as persons and move forward developmentally (Hamby, Blackburn, Edmundson, Hampton, & Reardon, 1977). This involves acting in concert with the person's developmental level and also creating dissonance within them by structuring situations that require them to act in manners consistent with higher level behaviors.

For example, a level 5 person might be directed to act as a mentor for a level 4 person

and told that his performance bonus would depend, in large part, on the protégé's performance. Conversely, a level 6 person might be allowed to work on a desired project in a self-directed group, with other person he enjoys socially. Yet, he might be given firm deadlines for project completion or the group and project would be abandoned. In both instances, the target person would have to exhibit specific behaviors associated with their current developmental level and also produce specific behavior associated with higher developmental levels. Figure 1 here

A further role for a leader would be to ensure or minimize the chance that individuals do not regress along the levels of existence. Graves holds that dissonance creates stress and that this stress is the catalyst for forward movement through the levels. However, excessive stress combined with a lack of support and direction could cause a person to move backwards (i.e., to drop a level or two). Within this framework, a level 6 person would drop to a level 4 person, or a level 5 person would drop to a level 3. For example, a leader functioning at level 5 might have expended a significant amount of time and effort on a high priority project with great profit potential. If the project failed or did not result in additional outcomes, the leader might replace his leadership team, fire the project staff, berate those involved with the project, or identify an individual as the primary cause and treat him as a scapegoat. All of these behaviors are typical of a level 3 person whose primary motivation is to exercise and demonstrate personal power.

The most effective type of leadership from Grave's perspective is one that differentially addresses and manages each person in the organization individually. It should be rigid enough to accomplish the organization's goals, yet flexible enough to enhance the growth of all organization members.

Payne, Mercer, and Epstein (1977) suggest it is healthy for an organization to suffer temporarily if it enhances organizational and personnel growth. This suggests the leaders must take employees where they are and lead in such a way that all may benefit.

From a Gravesian perspective, a leader must develop mature psychological behaviors and understand that human development is a constantly evolving process concerned with the solution of certain problems of existence at a given level. The process also produces new problems at future developmental levels to be solved as each individual experiences growth. Each and every human being's interpretation of the world is open to change. As levels of existence change, the problems to be solved change and the values change. New levels of existence require that problems be addressed within the limits of a person's available knowledge and the interrelated events within the environment. Addressing problems at each level of existence can be facilitated through an understanding and respect for the process of sociological development. Understanding this process leads to a better understanding of self and others.

Mature psychosocial behavior begins with understanding self, leading to understanding others, to the search for information about us all as an interrelated community. An effective leader understands how to use the abilities, skills, intelligence, energy, and creativity of each and every individual in an organization. Such an understanding changes us, our organization, and how we work together. It puts the individual at the center of the organizational operation and allows the leader to discharge their most important role, the identification, development, and utilization of the world's most important resources – human resources.

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Dennis Bunch is an Assistant Professor in the
Leadership and Counselor Education
Department at The University of Mississippi.
His research interests are: The Effectiveness of
the Principalship, Program Effectiveness of
Principal Preparation Programs, and Issues of Fit
in Administrative Positions. **Dr. Bunch** is the
corresponding author on this article and can be
contacted at dbunch@olemiss.edu.

Jennifer Fillingim is an Assistant Professor in
the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at
Austin Peay State University. **Dr. Fillingim** can
be reached at fillingimj@apsu.edu.

Joe Blackburn was an Associate Professor in
the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at
The University of Mississippi when this article
was accepted for publication.